

Approved minutes of December 18 2012 Providence City Plan Commission meeting.

CPC Minutes of December 18, 2012

A regular meeting of the City Plan Commission (CPC) was held on Tuesday, December 18, 2012 at 4:45 p.m.in the Department of the Planning and Development (DPD) 1st Floor Meeting Room, 444 Westminster Street, Providence, Rhode Island.

Opening Session

Call to order: Chairman Durkee called the meeting to order at 4:48 p.m.

Members Present: Chairman Stephen Durkee, Ina Anderson, Harrison Bilodeau, Christine West, JoAnn Ryan and Meredyth Church

Staff Present: Robert Azar and Choyon Manjrekar

Approval of meeting minutes from November 20th 2012: The item was continued to the next meeting.

Approval of the CPC meeting schedule for the 2013 calendar year: Ms. Ryan made a motion seconded by Mr.

Bilodeau to approve the 2013 meeting schedule. All voted in favor.

MAJOR LAND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

1. Case No. 12-011 MA – 257 Thayer Street (Preliminary Plan Approval)

The applicant is seeking preliminary plan approval to construct a four story mixed use building with 95 dwelling

units intended for student housing with a retail area on the ground floor. Underground parking and a landscaped interior courtyard will be provided – for action (AP 13 Lots 42, 48, 104, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238 and 241, College

Hill) A transcript of this item is available on request

Mr. Azar explained the history of the project including the changes to the comprehensive plan and zoning ordinance obtained by the applicant in addition to the master plan approval granted by the CPC.

Mr. Robert Gilbane presented a history of the approval process for the project and spoke about the changes made to the building's design since it had received Master Plan approval. Changes included changing the roof of the building, "breaking up" the design of the façade to make it look more open and constructing to 3-D model of the project to show the project in the context of the rest of the neighborhood.

Mr. Donald Powers, the project architect, made a presentation which explained the project's design and highlighted its new architectural features. He said the scale of the project resembled the mix of institutional, commercial and residential uses seen around Thayer Street. He explained the details on each building façade, comparing them to the plan submitted at the master plan stage. He said the Brook Street façade had been broken up to expose the courtyard and interact with the other buildings on the street.

Mr. Powers asked Mr. David Taglianetti to explain the stormwater management measures. Mr. Taglianetti said the site currently was 90 percent impervious but would have slightly less under proposed conditions with the addition of some pervious surface. He said there would be fewer sediments in the runoff due to the building on site and continued to explain stormwater measures. Mr. Azar said the applicant's stormwater management plan had been approved by the City Engineer, who said that the oil water separator should be depicted on the plans. Mr. Taglianetti said the separator had been conceptually depicted on the plan. A discussion on the drainage system ensued.

Mr. Powers continued to explain the proposed landscaping and discussed the building elevations using renderings of the building. Mr. Bill Ashworth presented the traffic study and said the development would reduce the number of curb cuts from nine to two, which would result in improved circulation. He said agreements with Zipcar and

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promotion of cycling would also contribute to traffic improvements. Mr. Azar said the traffic study was approved by the City Engineer, but there was concern about the low number of parking spaces. Mr. Azar said the project conforms to the zoning of the site. He said the building presented features like bicycle access, promotion of car

sharing and proximity to public transport, which would alleviate demand for parking and reduce movement.

Mr. Edward Pimentel said he had conducted a site analysis of the project, which found the development to be an improvement over what exists on site and was in conformance with the Zoning Ordinance and Comprehensive Plan.

He said he agreed with the DPD's staff report. Mr. Azar said the R-M high zone had a height limit of 45 feet, but the gables of the building slightly exceeded that height limit for a total height of approximately 54 feet. He said the applicant was requesting a dimensional adjustment for the excess height from the CPC. Mr. Bilodeau said he approved of the revised design. Ms. West said she was in favor of the revised design and made suggestions regarding the exterior and landscaping of the building. A discussion on the building's design ensued. Ms. Anderson said she found the revised design to be better suited to the surroundings than the previous version. She asked for more information on the building's LEED certification. Mr. Russell Broderick said the building would be LEED certified but would probably not have the silver certification. A discussion on sustainability ensued. Ms. Ryan asked about provision of access to the neighboring building on Thayer Street. Mr. Powers said space was provided in the interest of being a good neighbor. Ms. Ryan asked about the amount of space dedicated to bicycle parking. Mr.

Broderick said he estimated there was space for more than 20 bicycles. Ms. Ryan asked about the dimensions of the courtyard. Mr. Powers said it was 150 feet long with a varying width between 20 and 26 feet. Mr. Durkee said he appreciated the opening in the courtyard and asked if the leasing office could be moved away from the Thayer Street frontage. He said he would prefer to see retail development along Thayer to preserve the vitality of the street. Mr. Durkee asked about the building schedule. Mr. Gilbane said he would like to start building by June 2013. Mr. Durkee asked about building lighting. Mr. Powers said a combination of street lighting and illumination on the building would be used. A discussion on lighting ensued. Councilman Samuel Zurier asked if the item could be continued to the following month to allow for more review of the project. He spoke about the approval process and said residents required more time to review the project and to view the project model. Mr. Shamoon of the Providence Preservation Society (PPS) read a letter sent to Mr. Azar outlining PPS' concerns with the building's design, materials used and the plans submitted. He said PPS was also concerned about the parking spaces that would be used by Zipcar. He requested that the Commission not take action for a month to allow the PPS more time for review. Mr. Albin Moser representing the abutter Stonehenge Partners introduced Frank Lewis, who spoke about the history of the water

table and the history of flooding on site. He said the project could cause flooding on neighboring properties. Mr. Moser said he had not been previously informed of the provision of access from the building façade on Thayer Street. He requested more time to deal with the issues.

Mr. Seth Kurn presented the Commission a report prepared by Richard Youngken and said the project would destabilize neighboring residences. Mr. Grant Dulgarian said that he would like to see the project scaled back with fewer units, that there should be no food service within the commercial area of the building and that Brown University should assist with moving the buildings from the site onto their land.

Mr. Thomas Moses said he had sent the abutter a notification regarding the building design. He said the height of the building was permitted by right under current zoning and requested that the CPC take action on the item to keep the project on schedule. He said the applicant was willing to contribute to moving houses if matching funds were provided. Mr. Moser said he did not receive notification from the applicant.

Mr. Durkee said the intent of the project was not expected to change if a decision was delayed. He suggested that the final plan could be reviewed by the CPC. Mr. Bilodeau said he approved of the revised design and said approving the final plan on January 15 would give residents time to comment on

the project. Ms. West said the CPC should act on the preliminary plan and have the CPC review the final plan to allow time for public review. Ms. Church said she agreed with the other comments. Ms. Anderson said she was in favor of the CPC reviewing the final plan in January and said she felt that issues raised at the meeting could be addressed by the Thayer Street study. Mr. Azar said the request for proposals for the study had been posted. A discussion on the meeting schedule ensued. Mr. Azar said the CPC would be confirming compliance with the zoning ordinance and comprehensive plan by acting on the

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preliminary plan in addition to other required findings. He said that voting on the preliminary plan would vest the height, massing and scale of the project and the preliminary plan could not be reconsidered at the final plan stage.

He said if the CPC were to review the final plan, it would be reviewing compliance with the conditions for final plan approval and should specify what would be reviewed at the final plan stage. A discussion on review of the plan ensued. Mr. Azar read from the DPD's staff report, which found the project to conform to the comprehensive plan and the zoning ordinance. He recommended that the plan be approved subject to providing more details on site lighting merging the lots on site and having decorative grates on the garage in addition to the conditions of approval

in the staff report. He said the CPC should grant a dimensional adjustment for the building height. A discussion on the approval procedure ensued.

Ms. West made a motion seconded by Mr. Bilodeau to approve the preliminary plan subject to the findings and conditions in the DPD's staff report and approval of the dimensional relief sought by the applicant. The final plan would be reviewed by the Commission at the next regular meeting. Approval would be subject to the applicant providing more details on site lighting, merging the lots on site after demolition, having decorative grates on the garage and investigating drainage issues in and around the site. Final plan approval would be subject to the applicant considering the opinion of the Providence Preservation Society and the College Hill Neighborhood Association. All voted in favor.

Adjournment

Mr. Bilodeau made a motion seconded by Ms. Church to adjourn the meeting. All voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 7:06 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Choyon Manjrekar,
Recording Secretary